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ABSTRACT

This article relates observations about working as a full-time internal psychologist versus a part-time external psychologist in a residential treatment center. In the summary these advantages about employing external psychologists are given: (1) the external psychologist has the opportunity to function as an outside arbiter; (2) the opportunity exists for providing increased openness regarding discipline or employment concerns; (3) institutional staff may feel more comfortable making referrals to an external psychologist; (4) in-service training has the potential for being enhanced by the availability of an external psychologist's expertise; (5) the availability of an external psychologist allows in-residence, institutional caregivers the opportunity to maintain a more pragmatic, real-world oriented goal when working with students; and (6) the external psychologist has the opportunity to provide full-time staff with objective input related to the psychological well-being of students. In the summary these disadvantages of employing external psychologists are given: clients can more readily manipulate external psychologists; residents have a tendency to view external psychologists as more sympathetic to their needs; the possibility exists for a lack of a clear definition on the part of the institutional staff concerning the external psychologist's role; external psychologists may experience the frustration of being relatively ineffective in implementing changes in institutional policies; and the expectations and demands for the external/consulting psychologist to be diverse and multiply competent is potentially unrealistic. (ABL)

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Advantages and Drawbacks of Employing Full-time (Internal) Psychologists or Part-time (External) Psychologists

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Running Head: INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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Abstract

A full-time (Internal) psychologist and a part-time (external) psychologist offer their observations after working together for four years at the Indiana Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's Home, a residential treatment center for 240 boys and girls from troubled homes. Both advantages and drawbacks are offered to institutions and consulting psychologists regarding the employment of full-time and/or part-time psychologists.

Advantages and Drawbacks of Employing Full-time (Internal) Psychologists or Part-time (External) Psychologists

The first author is currently a part-time psychologist at the Indiana Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's Home (ISSCH), and the second author was previously a full-time staff psychologist there. Hutchinson (1971; 1986) observed, as a result of his employment over a 30 year time span in various agencies (sometimes as a part-time psychologist and sometimes as a full-time psychologist) that as a part-time (external or "outside-the-agency") counselor or psychologist he was perhaps perceived by residents and staff to be more trustworthy and less threatening than he was as a full-time internal or "inside-the-agency" counselor or psychologist. In a 1986 article, he (a) described the history and implementation of psychological services at ISSCH, (b) identified some of the advantages that an external psychologist might enjoy, (c) identified some possible drawbacks in that type of arrangement, and (d) offered suggestions to consulting psychologists and agencies who offer similar services.

At the time of that report, a full-time staff psychologist had recently been employed by ISSCH. Services of the external psychologist were also retained. After four years of working together, it became obvious that there were both advantages and drawbacks in each position and that this situation provided an interesting and unique opportunity for each of these psychologists to observe and to possibly enlighten other individuals or agencies experiencing similar employment decisions. Both the full-time psychologist and the part-time psychologist are licensed in the state of Indiana and have similar educational, theoretical, and counseling backgrounds.

Each of Hutchinson's (1986) original issues are listed followed by observations

based on our mutual and empirical experiences of the same concerns after working together for four years. We focus on our perceptions of (a) advantages that an external psychologist might enjoy and (b) possible drawbacks in that type of arrangement. Some of Hutchinson's (1971; 1986) original concerns were verified, but we also had some surprises.

Although we realize that our observations are still in the hypotheses building stage, we feel we have identified several key issues that could be fruitfully explored through additional controlled research. We are especially encouraged to report our experiences because of (a) the large number of inquiries, comments, and requests for reprints of the original (1986) article and (b) the interesting and intense (albeit sometimes defensive) reactions (both positive and negative) to the concept that an external psychologist may enjoy some advantages (e.g., clients possibly feeling less threatened when relating their personal feelings to someone not perceived as "part of the establishment"). It is our hope that these experiences will benefit other psychologists and employers of psychologists.

Institution

ISSCH is a large, residential children's home, originally established for the purpose of caring for military veterans' children who were deprived of personal, educational, and health care. More recently, children not directly related to military veterans have also been admitted. Approximately 240 children between the ages of three and eighteen years reside at ISSCH. Children considered for admission must be deemed educable and relatively free of severe behavioral, emotional, or physical handicaps.

Residents live in cottages housing 15-20 students. Each cottage has one or two resident houseparents who provide supervision and guidance in daily living. Students

attend Morton Memorial School, which is located on grounds and offers instruction in kindergarten through Grade 12. The school is fully accredited and provides general, college-preparatory, vocational, and specialized curricula.

Children at ISSCH are frequently from unstable families, or their families are nonexistent. Although ISSCH is viewed as an alternative home for these children, three full-time social workers coordinate and encourage contact with those relatives who maintain an interest in their children. Professional counseling and clinical intervention are provided by a full-time staff psychologist, an external part-time (3 half days a week) psychologist, a school counselor who also teaches half-time, and a chaplain trained as a pastoral counselor.

Suggestions for Other Psychologists and for Institutions Employing External Psychologists

Below we have listed Hutchinson's (1986) suggestions for psychologists and institutions employing external psychologists and have responded to each in terms of our experiences of working together during the past four years:

A central consideration is to determine what the psychologists' role(s) should be vis-a'-vis the institution Hutchinson (1986).

We were surprised to find in our situation that this was more of a problem for the internal psychologist than for the external psychologist. Although the full-time psychologist and institution were well aware of the importance of painstakingly negotiating role expectations contractually (Hutchinson, 1986), personnel changes and resulting institutional needs resulted in the full-time psychologist gradually assuming a quasi-administrative role (e.g., supervision of tutors, houseparents, social workers, deans). This became a serious problem for the full-time psychologist, and he

found it increasingly difficult to serve as an advocate and a confidant for the children.

The external psychologist worked under Chapter I guidelines (Negley, 1982). His responsibilities were clearly delineated in that he was to work directly with those students qualifying under Chapter I (Public Law 89-10 as amended by Public Law 93-380), including occasional consultation with their teachers when such consultation would better serve the student.

The institution and the psychologists must share their viewpoints on what constitutes acceptable institutional change (Hutchinson, 1986).

This was not a problem for either of us. The internal psychologist met with agency administrators as appropriate and had a key role in administrative decisions and functions. Several new programs were developed by the staff psychologist to benefit students. The external psychologist became involved in these decisions only when invited to do so or when his input regarding institutional structure was requested. In this capacity it was noted that the itinerant psychologist served a key role, providing impartial observations as a qualified arbitrator, enhancing the ability of the staff psychologist to maintain a more pragmatic approach to institutional concerns.

Part-time, external psychologists are likely to remain more objective and less compromised by the institutional culture than are those hired on a full-time basis (Hutchinson, 1986).

For some students this was not a problem, but others had difficulty distinguishing between the staff psychologist's role of administrator vs. counselor. It is our observation that in some cases students felt freer to "tell it like it is" to an external psychologist who had no direct responsibility for discipline, decisions regarding the students' readiness to leave the institution, or conflicts with houseparents. In addition, the staff psychologist was thrust into a supervisory role mandating his involvement in

institutional "in-fighting" among staff members, frequently resulting in instances of non-productive rhetoric.

Staff members should be encouraged to learn communication and intervention skills from the psychologists whenever possible (Hutchinson, 1986).

Although the external psychologist was sometimes asked to do workshops for houseparents (e.g., a communications workshop) and teachers (e.g., assertive discipline training), the internal psychologist had many more opportunities to incorporate psychological strategies and to demonstrate to child-care workers on a day-to-day basis how to communicate and otherwise interact with children under their care.

Regularly scheduled, informal communication sessions such as morning coffee and lunch are effective vehicles for establishing mutual respect and rapport between the psychologists and institutional personnel (Hutchinson, 1986).

The external psychologist had fewer opportunities to establish mutual respect and rapport. However, while the staff psychologist was ideally situated to get the feel of the current week's atmosphere at the institution, to identify potential problems or crises, to be cognizant of common professional interests, and to "just plain socialize," the external psychologist was well-positioned to make objective observations less influenced by institutional nuances or dogma.

Drawbacks to Psychological Services Being Offered by External Psychologists on Contractual Basis

Below we have listed Hutchinson's (1986) statements regarding drawbacks to psychological services being offered by external psychologists on a contractual basis and have responded to each in terms of the experience of working together during the

past four years:

Institutions contracting for external psychological services over an extended period of time do not demonstrate a permanent commitment to the provision of psychological services as part of an integrated service program for the institution (Hutchinson, 1986).

This did loom as a serious problem when the institution employed only part-time psychologists for many years. However, this concern was resolved when a much needed full-time psychologist was hired four years ago. Far greater support for an integrated team approach to dealing with residents' problems has been initiated and has been instrumental in decreasing the annual "serious incident" rate (i.e., suicide attempts, runaways, and physical confrontations) by approximately 60% (a decrease from 28-30 such incidents per year to the current level of 10-12).

It is possible for administrative personnel, who have less than a total commitment for institutional change, to assign external psychologists to responsibilities that derail them from direct administrative/staff interventions or from situations in which treatment policy is formulated or monitored (Hutchinson, 1986).

This concern was borne out to some degree. Although the internal psychologist was in a position to be less easily derailed from direct intervention with the entire staff of the agency, conflicts often arose when change was needed to facilitate child care. The part-time psychologist's original contract called for initiating staff interventions, making suggestions for agency structural changes, and conducting weekly workshops (e.g., with houseparents, maintenance crew, administrators; etc.). However, the external psychologist was finally assigned, via an annually renewable contract, to work directly with students only.

It is noted that this change in focus of psychological services came about ultimately as suggestions for change were made which directly affected the administrative staff and called for institutional change. Consequently, the

reassignment of the external psychologist at that time isolated him from day to day, direct contact with the institutional staff and could easily be interpreted as a reflection of the administration's unwillingness to facilitate institutional change.

Conversely, the staff psychologist was in a position where the possibility of derailment from direct interventions with administrative staff was less likely. The full-time psychologist was also in a more viable position regarding formulation and monitoring of treatment policy.

One must constantly address the question of whether external psychologists themselves manifest the same level of commitment to the institution that permanent (within-the-agency) psychologists do (Hutchinson, 1986).

This could be a serious concern in specific situations in that a full-time psychologist might be more serious about his/her work because their attention has less potential for division. However, it is our observation this is generally a function of the individual more than the setting. Our experience was that there was an equal commitment, but it was incumbent upon the staff psychologist to apprise the external psychologist of residents' behavioral problems in order to negate manipulative ploys by those individuals.

Psychologists have a responsibility for and must make a cogent contribution toward ensuring that psychological services are an integrated part of the treatment plan, especially for young, dependent children (Hutchinson, 1986).

This is a potentially problematic concern for agencies employing only external psychologists who are in a less favorable position, regarding implementation and monitoring of treatment plans, than full-time psychologists. It is our observation that the regular staff psychologist is more favorably positioned to ensure psychological services are an integral part of the agency's treatment plan.

Because of the distancing of external psychologists from policy making and governance, it is more difficult for them to function as change agents (Hutchinson, 1986).

This was found to be the case in our situation and was as we had expected. The external psychologist's contract did not call for him to intervene as a change agent. Many times suggestions were made when input was requested by agency personnel, but the external psychologist felt neither an obligation nor an ethical right to go beyond his contract and to implement change beyond that specifically called for in the contract. The internal psychologist, on the other hand, was in a position to initiate change as appropriate, monitoring and modifying change as needed.

By not being an integrated part of the institutional staff, the consultant may have a special role but also may be placed in very frustrating situations (Hutchinson, 1986).

As might be expected, both psychologists found themselves in frustrating situations at times. While both psychologists were able to see that certain institutional policies were not effective or perhaps even detrimental to the population served, the staff psychologist was in a better position to modify or implement policy changes. Conversely, the itinerant psychologist frequently felt the frustration of being relatively ineffective in implementing changes in institutional policies.

The consulting psychologist must carefully win the trust and acceptance of the institutional staff and yet distance himself or herself from internal political struggles (taking sides) (Hutchinson, 1986).

This area was a surprise to us. As the internal psychologist attempted policy and general institutional change to better serve the needs of the children, internal political struggles (most of them existing historically) began to surface. The unexpected result was that the full-time staff psychologist encountered more difficulty in this area than the part-time consulting psychologist whose contract was more specifically defined, calling

for direct counseling services only to students and consultation to teachers on an as-needed basis.

The expectations and demands for the consulting psychologist to be diverse and multiply competent is awesome (Hutchinson, 1986).

This was clearly the case when only an external psychologist was employed. However, the combination of external/internal psychologist has worked well and much of the expectation that the consulting psychologist has all the answers for all situations was lessened as the full-time psychologist, because of his position, was viewed as less omnipotent and allowed to be more realistically human.

External psychologists are at a considerable disadvantage in that they must learn the institutional structure and nuances and gain acceptance by the staff before they can make effective interventions or suggestions (Hutchinson, 1986).

This is a potentially troublesome matter, especially for consulting psychologists operating under brief and non-renewable contracts. Often by the time they have an understanding of the institutional structure and have gained rapport with the residents, their contracts have expired.

Summary

Pros in Employing external psychologists

1. The external psychologist has the opportunity to function as an outside/impartial arbiter.

2. Because the external psychologist is not viewed by clients or staff as part of the institution, the opportunity exists for providing increased openness regarding discipline or employment concerns.

3. Institutional staff may feel more comfortable making referrals to an external psychologist when they encounter problems with residents because such referrals

are less likely to be perceived as a reflection of the care-giver's inadequacy, and the fear of questionable activities being reflected in their work record is reduced.

4. In-service training has the potential of being enhanced by the availability of an external psychologist's expertise.

5. The availability of an external psychologist allows in-residence, institutional care-givers the opportunity to maintain a more pragmatic, real-world oriented goal when working with students.

6. The external psychologist has the opportunity to provide full-time staff with objective input related to the psychological well-being of students.

Cons in Employing External Psychologists

1. Clients can more readily manipulate external psychologists because the part-time psychologist is in a less favorable position to view residents in daily activities (milieu observation).

2. Residents have a tendency to view external psychologists as more sympathetic to their needs and sometimes have a tendency to present their views in a questionably favorable light to part-time psychologists.

3. Due to bureaucratic malaise, the possibility exists for a lack of a clear definition or understanding on the part of the institutional staff concerning the external psychologist's role.

4. External psychologists may experience the frustration of being relatively ineffective in implementing changes in institutional policies.

5. The expectations and demands for the external/consulting psychologist to be diverse and multiply competent is potentially unrealistic and awesome.

Conclusion

The decision as to whether to employ full-time (internal or "inside-the-agency")

psychologists, part-time (external or "outside-the-agency") psychologists, or a combination of the two is, of course, a decision unique to each agency and their particular needs. However, from our perspective, having worked together for four years and having experienced all of the mentioned combinations, we believe the employment of external psychologists results in both pros and cons. Additionally, we have concluded that agencies which can afford to employ a combination of external and internal psychologists will find themselves in an enviable position, providing the opportunity for maximum service to the population they serve.

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